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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some forms of inquiry that are becoming influential within teacher education. In particular, the document focuses on forms of inquiry variously called "stories," "narratives," "personal knowledge," "practical knowledge," or in one particular genre "personal practical knowledge." Storying and narratology are genres which allow movement beyond (or to the side) of the main paradigms of educational inquiry--with their numbers, variables, psychometrics, psychologies, and decontextualized theories. Potentially then, the new genres offer the chance for a substantial step forward in the representation of lived experience in schooling. Because of this substantial potential, the new genres require very close scrutiny, for while they have some obvious strengths, there are some weaknesses which may prove incapacitating. This investigation seeks to locate the genres of narrative and storying within the emergent cultural patterns of contemporary societies and economies. The media context of personal knowledge is examined and a series of questions and issues are raised as a result. In the final section, some conclusions as to the role of personal knowledge in educational research are provided. (Contains 22 references.) (LL)

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'The Story So Far': Personal Knowledge and the Political

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts an exploration of some forms of enquiry that are becoming influential within teacher education. Storying and narratology are genres which allow us to move beyond (or to the side) of the main paradigms of educational inquiry -- with their numbers, their variables, their psychometrics, their psychologies, their decontextualized theories. Potentially then, the new genres offer the chance for a substantial step forward in the representation of lived experience in schooling.

Because of this substantial potential, the new genres require very close scrutiny, for whilst they have some obvious strengths, there are some weaknesses which may prove incapacitating. If so, we may be sponsoring genres of enquiry in the name of empowerment, whilst at the same time, effectively dispowering the very people and causes we seek to work with.

This exploration seeks to locate the genres of narrative and storying within the emergent cultural patterns of contemporary societies and economies. The media context of personal knowledge is examined and a series of questions and issues raised as a result. In the final section, some conclusions as to the role of personal knowledge in educational research are provided.

'The Story So Far':
Personal Knowledge and the Political

In this paper I conduct an exploration of some forms of inquiry that are becoming influential within teacher education. In particular, I want to focus on forms of inquiry variously called "stories", "narratives", "personal knowledge", "practical knowledge" or in one particular genre "personal practical knowledge".

I find myself highly sympathetic to the urge to generate new ways of producing, collaborating, representing and knowing. They offer a serious opportunity to question many of the in-built biases of race, class, or gender, which existing modes of inquiry mystify whilst reproducing (See Giroux, 1991). Storying and narratology are genres which allow us to move beyond (or to the side) of the main paradigms of inquiry — with their numbers, their variables, their psychometrics, their psychologisms, their decontextualized theories. Potentially then, the new genres offer the chance for a large step forward in representing the lived experience of schooling.

Because of this substantial potential the new genres require very close scrutiny. For whilst they have some obvious strengths, there are I think, some weaknesses which may prove incapacitating. If so, we may be sponsoring genres of inquiry in the name of empowerment, whilst at the same time, effectively disempowering the very people and causes we seek to work with.

Personal Knowledge and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernity

Before embracing personal knowledge in the form of narratives and story it is important to locate this genre within the emergent cultural patterns of contemporary societies and economies. Whilst the pace of change at the moment is rapid, a good deal of evidence points to an increasingly aggrandizing centre or state acting to sponsor "voices" at the level of interest groups, localities and peripheries. From the perspective of these groups this may look like empowerment for oppressed aboriginals, physically and mentally challenged, gays and lesbians and other deserving groups. This is all long overdue. But we need to be aware of the overall social matrix. Specific empowerment can go hand in hand with overall social control.

Hence, alongside these new voices a systematic attack on median or secondary associations is underway - schools, universities, libraries, welfare agencies and the like. An attack, in fact,

on many of the existing agencies of cultural mediation and production. Economic restructuring is being closely allied to cultural redefinition - a reduction of contextual and theoretical discourses and an overall sponsorship of personal and practical forms of discourse and cultural production. The overall effect will be to substantially redraw existing modes of political and cultural analysis. In its place we may end up with what Harvey (1989) calls the "tyranny of the local" alongside what we might call the specificity of the personal. General patterns, social contexts, critical theories will be replaced by local stories and personal anecdotes.

Denzin (1991) has commented on this in his critique of the rehabilitated "life story movement".

> The cultural logics of late capitalism valorize the life story, autobiographical document because they keep the myth of the autonomous, free individual alive. This logic finds its modern roots on Rousseau's *Confessions*, a text perfectly fitted to the cultural logics of the new capitalist societies where a division between public and private had to be maintained, and where the belief in a pure, natural self was cherished. The logic of the confession reifies the concept of the self and turns it into a cultural commodity. The rise to power of the social sciences in the twentieth century corresponded to the rise of the modern surveillance state. That state required information on its citizens. Social scientists, of both qualitative and quantitative commitments, gathered information for this society. The recent return to the life story celebrates the importance of the individual under the conservative politics of late postmodernism (p. 2).

Hence, in the cultural logic of late capital the life story represents a form of cultural apparatus to accompany a newly aggrandising state and market system. In the situation that is being "worked for" the subject/state, consumer/market confrontation will be immediate. The range of secondary associations and bureaucracies which currently "buffer" or mediate this pattern of social relations will be progressively reduced. The cultural buffer of theory, critique and political commentary will likewise wither. It will not be the state that withers (as in fond marxist theory) but the critical theory and cultural critique that stand against the state. In the "end of history" we shall indeed see the closure of cultural contestation as evidenced in theoretical and critical discourse. In its place will stand a learned discourse comprising stories and practices - specific local and located but divorced from understandings of social context and social process.

In the next section I review how this cultural redefinition is emerging in some aspects of the media.

The Media Context of Personal Knowledge

This section briefly examines the promotion of more personal stories at the level of the media. The promotional strategies at these levels pose questions about in whose interests the move to more personal knowledge is being undertaken. There is after all an "opportunity cost" to the time being spent on personal stories — in a finite world of time, less time is thereby spent on other aspects, most notably on more wider ranging political and social analysis.

The move towards story-telling is becoming pronounced in the media. This can be seen most clearly in the media of those countries which have retained until recently, a strong tradition of political and cultural analysis. Michael Ignatieff, a Canadian working in Britain and one of the most elegant of cultural analysts recently wrote in *The Observer*, "Whatever we hacks may piously profess, the media is not in the information business. It is in the story-telling business (Ignatieff, 1992, p. 21)". He then details a range of new developments in the British media which evidence this trend. Story-telling and personal anecdotes are the powerful new fashion he writes.

> As if to make this plain, ITN's *News at Ten* is reintroducing its 'And finally' endpiece, 'traditionally devoted to animals, children and royalty'. After footage from Sarajevo, we'll be treated, for example, to the sight of some lovable ducks on a surfboard. The ducks are there not just to cheer us up but to reach those subliminal zones of ourselves which long to believe that the horror of Sarajevo is just so much nasty make-believe.
>
> The audience's longing for stories about ducks on surfboards is only one of the trends which is taking the media away from even notional attention to the real world. The other is the media's growing fascination with itself. The last few weeks have seen this obsession inflate to baroque extremes of narcissism. When Trevor McDonald gets the *News at Ten* job and Julia Somerville does not: when Sir David English vacates one editor's chair and Simon Jenkins vacates another; when Andrew Neil snarls at the 'saintly' Andreas Whittam-Smith and the saint snarls back, I ask myself: does anybody care but us hacks? (p. 21)

He notes that, "there's a price to pay when the media systematically concentrates on itself and ignores the world outside". The opportunity cost of story-telling is that personal minutiae and anecdote replace cultural analysis. Above all, the "story" is the other side of a closure on broad analysis, a failure for imagination. He writes:

> In this failure and in the media's amazing self-absorption, I see a shrinking in journalism's social imagination. What I know about the 1980's I owe to a journalism which believed that the challenge was to report Britain as if it was an unknown country: Bea Campbell's *Road to Wigan Pier*, for example, or Ian Jack's

> *Before the Oil Ran Out*. In place of genuine social curiosity, we have the killer interview, the media profile, the latest stale gossip. It's so fashionable we can't even see what a capitulation it represents.(p. 21)

The reasons for the promotion of the anecdote and personal story, are both broadly cultural and political but also specifically economic. They relate to emerging patterns of globalisation and corporatisation. Broadly speaking, the British media is following American patterns in pursuit of American sponsorship. American capital is thereby reproducing the American pattern of decontextualized story-telling.

We find that with the British *News at Ten* the new initiatives in broadcasting style.

> ...is part of a new-look bulletin, which will, in the words of one ITN executive, become 'more formulaic with a more distinctive human interest approach'. Viewers, it seems, like certainty both in the format of a bulletin and the person who presents it. Lessons have bee learnt from American TV news by senior ITN managers such as chief executive Bob Phillis, editor-in-chief Stewart Purvis and *News at Ten* producer Nigel Dacre (brother of Paul, the new editor of the *Daily Mail*) (Brooks, 1992, p.69).

The reason for the convergence which American styles of story-telling are addressed later.

> By 1994, ITV companies must become minority shareholders in ITN. American TV companies, CNN, CBS and NBC, have already cast their eyes over ITN, though only one of them is likely to take a stake. It is no coincidence that *News at Ten* will have a more of an American look — the single anchor, like Dan Rather or Peter Jennings, for example.
>
> In short, ITN and *News at Ten* are being dressed up to be more attractive not just to viewers, but also to prospective buyers.(p. 69)

In America it is obvious that the "story" is being employed specifically to close off sustained political and cultural analysis. John Simpson (1992) recently wrote about "the closing of the American media". In this closure, the "story" took pride of place in cutting America off from international news and political analysis. Simpson analyzed the CBS news.

> After reports on drought in the western United States and the day's domestic political news, the rest of CBS's news broadcast was devoted to a regular feature, 'Eye on America'. This evening's item was about a man who was cycling across America with his son, a sufferer from cerebral palsy. It was designed to leave you with a warm feeling, and lasted for three minutes, 58 seconds; longer than the time devoted that night to the whole of the rest of the world.
>
> It is no surprise that soon there will almost certainly be no American television network correspondent based anywhere in the southern hemisphere. Goodbye Africa; goodbye most of Asia; goodbye Latin America. (p. 9)

As you would expect from a Briton, Simpson concludes that the only repository of serious cultural analysis is on British television which as we have seen, is being re-structured according to American imperatives. The circle in short, is closed:

> The sound of an Englishman being superior about America is rarely uplifting; but in this case the complaints come most fiercely from the people who work for American television themselves. They know how steep the decline has been, and why it has happened. All three networks have been brought up by giant corporations which appear to regard news and current affairs as branches of the entertainment industry, and insist they have to pay their way with advertisers just as chat-shows and sit coms do. Advertisers are not good people for a news organization to rely on: during the Gulf war NBC lost $25 million in revenue because companies which had bought space in the news bulletins cancelled their advertisements — they were afraid their products would appear alongside reports of American casualties.
>
> The decline of the networks is depressing. CBS is one of the grandest names in journalism, the high-minded organisation which broadcast Ed Murrow's wartime despatches from London and Walter Cronkite's influential verdicts on the Vietnam war and Watergate. NBC's record is a proud one too. Recently it announced it was back in the news business and would stop broadcasting stories that were simply features. But NBC News seems very close to the rocks nowadays, and it does not have the money to send its teams abroad in the way it did until a couple of years ago. The foreign coverage will mostly be based on pictures from the British television news agency Visnews, and from the BBC. (p. 9)

We have entered the period of "authoritarian capital", and Simpson argues that the "story" is the indicator of this denouement. If this is so, the promoters of storying have strange bed fellows.

> Earl and Irma, meanwhile, are still there in front of their television sets, serenely unaware of what is happening around them. Decisions which affect their lives are being taken every day in Frankfurt, Tokyo and London, but no one tells them about it. Most of the companies which advertise on television just want them to feel good so, therefore, do the people in charge of providing them with news. The freest society in the world has achieved the kind of news blackout which totalitarian régimes can only dream about.(p. 9)

In one sense the enshrinement of the personal story as a central motif for knowledge transmission links up with another theme in current restructuring. Namely: the reconstruction of the middle ground in the social and economic system. By sponsoring voices at the periphery, the centre may well be strengthening its hand. Hence, empowerment of personal and peripheral voices can go hand in hand with aggrandizement and a further concentration of power at the centre. As

Alan Wolfe has pointed out in his new book *Whose Keeper?*: "...a debate that casts government and the marketplace as the main mechanisms of social organization leaves out all those intermediate institutions that are, in fact, the most important in people's lives: family, church, neighbourhood associations, workplace ties, unions and a variety of informal organizations (quoted in Dionne, 1992, p. 18)."

The current appeal to personal and "family values" in the U.S. election undoubtedly is driven by a realisation of this kind of dissolution of mediating social structures. "The appeal of this vague phrase is that fundamentally it reminds people that good society depends not only, or even primarily, on their economic well-being, but also on this web of personal-social relationships that transcend the marketplace and transcend government (Rosenthal, 1992, section 4, p. 1)."

This focus on storytelling emerged early in the movies. By 1914, William and Cecil DeMille had developed a technique of storytelling that would "follow the old dramatic principles, but adapt itself to a new medium", "find its own compensations for its lack of words...to make a train of thought visible enough to be photographed (Berg, 1989, p. 48)". By 1916, this had evolved to the point where a ghostwriter for Samuel Goldwyn could write, "by the time I started the Goldwyn Company it was the player, not the play which was the thing (p. 68)."

Likewise in the world of fantasy, promoted by the movies, stories are the central motif for colonising and re-directing lived experience. This has been so since very early on as the Goldwyn quotes indicate.

> A painless way to make sense of this new world was suggested by one of the modernizing forces itself: the movies. The movies offered many forms of guidance to confused Americans, particularly to immigrant urban dwellers; they became a virtual manual for acculturation. But one of the most important and most subtle services the movies offered was to serve as a popular model of narrative coherence. If reality was overwhelming, one could always carve it into a story, as the movies did. One could bend life to the familiar and comforting formulas one saw in the theatre (The New York Times, 1991, p. 32).

From the beginning, then, movies began to explore new terrains for formularizing and domesticating reality.

In American life, beginning in the 1920s, a number of media began to exploit the storying theme, first initiated in the movies. The tabloid press and then magazines and television began to provide a range of real life plots from kidnappings and murder to political scandals, to crimes in

executive suites, to election campaigns, to World War II, to the cold war, to Watergate, to the recent Soviet coup attempt, to Operation Restore Hope.

> Today, virtually all the news assumes a narrative configuration with cause and effect, villain and hero, beginning, middle and provisional end, and frequently a moral. Events that don't readily conform, the savings and loan scandal, for example, seem to drift in foggy limbo like a European art film rather than a sleek commercial American hit. (p. 32)

It might be judged that the savings and loan scandal could have been made to conform to a very exciting storyline but it was in fact pushed off into foggy limbo. This raises the key question of the power of storying to make vivid and realistic certain storylines whilst suppressing others, hence, it is clear that murders and fires and kidnappings are exciting material for storylines but that many of the things that go on in American society somehow or other do not form a reasonable storyline. It is interesting, therefore, that so influential a newspaper as *The New York Times* should see the savings and loan scandal as not worthy of a storyline. They are, in short, accepting the assumptions which underpin the genre.

Let me return once more to *The New York Times* for one extended quote on the importance of storying in the news:

> That is why reading the news is just like watching a series of movies: a hostage crisis is a thriller, the Milwaukee serial murders a morbidly fascinating real-life "Silence of the Lambs," the Kennedy Palm Beach case a soap opera, a fire or hurricane a disaster picture.
>
> One even suspects that Americans were riveted by the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings last week not because of any sense of civic duty but because it was a spellbinding show -- part "Rashomon," part "Thelma and Louise," part "Witness for the Prosecution."
>
> But as with movies, if "formularizing" reality is a way of domesticating it, it is also a means of escaping it. Michael Wood in his book "America in the Movies", described our films as a "rearrangement of our problems into shapes which tame them, which disperse them to the margins of our attention" where we can forget about them. By extending this function to life itself, we convert everything from the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby to the marital misadventures of Elizabeth Taylor into distractions, cheap entertainments that transport us from our problems.
>
> But before disapproving too quickly, one is almost compelled to admit that turning life into escapist entertainment has both a perverse logic and a peculiar genius. Why worry about the seemingly intractable problems of society when you can simply declare, "It's morning in America" and have yourself a long-running

> Frank Capra movie right down to an aw-shucks President? Why fret over America's declining economic might when you can have an honest-to-goodness war movie that proves your superiority? Movies have always been a form of wish fulfilment. Why not life?
>
> When life is a movie, it poses serious questions for those things that were not traditionally entertainment and now must accommodate themselves. Politics, for instance. Much has already been made of the fact that Ronald Reagan came to the White House after a lifetime as a professional actor. Lou Cannon, in his biography of Mr. Reagan, "President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime," details just how central this was to Mr. Reagan's concept of the Presidency and what it suggests about the political landscape.(p. 32)

The important point to grasp about this quote and other quotes is that the storying genre is far from socially and politically neutral. As we saw in an earlier quotation, the savings and loan scandal was somehow not a valid storyline. Likewise, the great exploiters of storylines, the John Waynes, the Ronald Reagans, tend to be of a particular political persuasion and of a particular sensitivity to the dominant interest groups within American Society. Storying, therefore, rapidly becomes a form of social and political prioritizing, a particular way of telling stories which in its way privileges some storylines and silences others. Once the focus shifts not to real events but "what makes a good story", it is a short distance to making an argument that certain political realities "would not make a good story", whilst others would. By displacing its focus from real life events into storying potential, it is possible also to displace some unwanted social and political realities. Even when unwanted realities do intrude in deafening ways, such as the LA riots, it is possible to story them in ways that create a distance of sorts. In Umberto Eco's words, it is possible to move from a situation where realities are scrutinized and analysed to the world of American life where "hyper realities" are constructed.

Storytelling and Educational Study

Now because the media often employs stories to close off political and cultural analysis does not itself disprove the value of storying and narrative in educational study. I would however urge that it is cause for pause in two ways. Firstly, if stories are so easily used in this manner in the media it is plainly possible that they might act in this way as educational study. Secondly, as is made clear in some of the foregoing quotes, the way we "story" our lives (and therefore the way we present ourselves for educational study, among other things) is deeply connected to

storylines derived from elsewhere. In American life especially, but increasingly elsewhere, forms of narrative and storying, the classic "storylines", are often derived from television and newspapers. In this sense Ronald Reagan is not alone; he made such a representative President because of his capacity to catch and dispatch the central storylines of American life. "It's morning in America" sounded right and true. It was a powerful storyline and it was not seriously contested by political or cultural analysis. But with the power of hindsight wasn't it a gigantic lie which inaugurated a new economic depression?

Stories then need to be closely interrogated and analysed in their social context. Stories in short are most often carriers of dominant messages, themselves agencies of domination. Of course oppositional stories can be captured but they are very much a minority form and are often themselves overlaid or reactive to dominant storylines. As Gordon Wells (1986) has warned us a previous expression of reality is largely "a distillation of the stories that we have shared: not only the narratives that we have heard and told, read, or seen enacted in drama or news on television, but also the anecdotes, explanations, and conjectures that are drawn upon in everyday conversation (p. 196)" or as Passerini (1987) has noted "when someone is asked for his life-story, his memory draws on pre-existing story-lines and ways of telling stories, even if these are in part modified by the circumstances (p. 28)." Put in another way this means that we often narrate our lives according to a "prior script", a script written elsewhere, by others, for other purposes.

Seen in this way the use of stories in educational study needs to become part of a broader project of re-appropriation. It is not sufficient to say we wanted "to listen to people", "to capture their voices" "to let them tell their stories". A far more active collaboration is required. Luisa Passerini's work on the Turin's working class and on women's personal narratives is exemplary in this regard. (Passerini, 1987; 1989) As Weiler (1991) has summarized:

> Passerini's emphasis on recurrent narrative forms begins to uncover the way people reconcile contradictions, the ways they create meaning from their lives, and create a coherent sense of themselves through available forms of discourse. At the same time, she is concerned with the "bad fit" or "gap" between "pre-existing story lines" and individual constructions of the self through memory. As individuals construct their past, they leave unresolved contradictions at precisely those points at which authoritative discourse conflicts with collective cultural meanings. (pp. 6-7)

At the centre of any move to aid people, teachers in particular, to reappropriate their individual lived experiences as stories is the need for active collaboration. In the case of teachers, this will sometimes be in association with educators located in the academy, especially in Faculties of Education.

The relationship of studies of teachers' stories to the academy sits, I believe, at the centre of one of the major ethical and methodological issues involved in any move to develop collaborative use of stories. Of course, views of the academy cover a wide spectrum from a belief in its role in the "disinterested pursuit of knowledge" through to the assertion of the Situationist International that "The intelligentsia is power's hall of mirrors." In general, I would take a position which stresses the *interestedness* rather than disinterestedness of the academy. I see a good deal of empirical evidence that David Tripp's (1987) contention in this matter may be correct for he argues that: "When a research method gains currency and academic legitimacy, it tends to be transformed to served the interests of the academy (p. 2)".

Becker (1970) has commented on the "hierarchy of credibility regarding those to whom we tend to listen". This has general relevance to our research on schooling and school systems and specifically to our desire to listen to the teacher's voice.

> In any system of ranked groups, participants take it as given that members of the highest group have the right to define the way things really are. In any organization, no matter what the rest of the organization chart shows, the arrows indicate the flow of information point up, thus demonstrating (at least formally) that those at the top have access to a more complete picture of what is going on than anyone else. Members of lower groups will have incomplete information and their view of reality will be partial and distorted in consequence. Therefore, from the point of view of a well socialized participant in the system, any tale told by those at the top intrinsically deserves to be regarded as the most credible account obtainable of the organizations' workings. (p. 126)

He provides a particular reason why accounts "from below" may be unwelcome:

> officials usually have to lie. That is a gross way of putting it, but not inaccurate. Officials must lie because things are seldom as they ought to be. For a great variety of reasons, well-known to sociologists, institutions are refractory. They do not perform as society would like them to. Hospitals do not cure people; prisons do not rehabilitate prisoners; schools do not educate students. Since they are supposed to, officials develop ways both of denying the failure of the institution to perform as it should and explaining those failures which cannot be hidden. An account of an institution's operation from the point of view of subordinates

> therefore casts doubt on the official line and may possibly expose it as a lie. (p. 128)

For these reasons the academy normally accepts the "hierarchy of credibility": "we join officials and the man in the street in an unthinking acceptance of the hierarchy of credibility. We do not realize that there are sides to be taken and that we are taking one of them". Hence Becker argues that for the academic researcher:

> The hierarchy of credibility is a feature of society whose existence we cannot deny, even if we disagree with its injunction to believe the man at the top. When we acquire sufficient sympathy with subordinates to see things from their perspective, we know that we are flying in the face of what "everyone knows". The knowledge gives us pause and cause us to share, however briefly, the doubt of our colleagues. (p. 129)

Research work, then, is seldom disinterested and prime interests at work are the powerful, Becker's "man at the top", and the academy itself. Acknowledgement of these interests becomes crucial when we conduct studies of teachers' stories; for the data generated and accounts rendered can easily be misused and abused by both powerful interest groups and by the academy. Middleton (1992) notes that "in schools people are constantly regulated and classified" but this surveillance extends to teachers themselves. (p. 20) Plainly studies of teachers' stories can be implicated in this process unless we are deeply watchful about who "owns" the data and who controls the accounts. If Becker is right that "officials lie" it is also plain that they might appropriate and misuse data about teachers' lives. Likewise, those in the academy might take information on teachers' lives and use it entirely for their own purposes.

Yet Becker reminds us that the terrain of research involves not only differentiated voices but stratified voices. It is important to remember that the politicians and bureaucrats who control schools are part of a stratified system where "those at the top have a more complete picture of what is going on than anyone else." It would be unfortunate if in studying teachers' stories, we ignored these contextual parameters which so substantially impinge upon and constantly restrict the teacher's life. It is, therefore, I think a crucial part of our ethical position as researchers that we do not "valorize the subjectivity of the powerless" in the name of telling "their story". This would be to merely record constrained consciousness - a profoundly conservative posture and one, as Denzin has noted, which no doubt explains the popularity of such work during the recent conservative political renaissance. In my view teachers' stories should, where possible, provide

not only a "*narrative of action*", but also a history or *genealogy of context*. I say this in full knowledge that this opens up substantial dangers of changing the relationship between "story giver" and "research taker" and of tilting the balance of the relationship further towards the academy.

I think, however, that these dangers must be faced if a genuine collaboration between the life story giver and the research taker is to be achieved. In a real sense "it cannot be all give and no take". In what sense is the "research taker" in a position to give and provide the basis for a reasonably equitable collaboration. I have argued elsewhere that what we are searching for in developing genuine collaboration in studying teachers' stories is a viable "*trading point*" between life story giver and research taker. The key to this trading point is, I believe, the differential structural location of the research taker. The academic has the time and the resources to collaborate with teachers in developing "genealogies of context". These genealogies can provide teachers as a group with aspects of "the complete picture" which those that control their lives have (or at least aspire to have).

> Much of the work that is emerging on teachers' lives throws up structural insights which locate the teacher's life within the deeply structured and embedded environment of schooling. This provides a prime "trading point" for the external researcher. For one of the valuable characteristics of a collaboration between teachers as researchers and external researchers is that it is a collaboration between two parties that are differentially located in structural terms. Each see the world through a different prism of practice and thought. This valuable difference may provide the external researcher with a possibility to offer back goods in "the trade". The teacher/researcher offers data and insights. The terms of trade, in short, look favourable. In such conditions collaboration may at last begin (Goodson and Walker, 1990, pp. 148-149).

In arguing for the provision of histories or genealogies of context, I am reminded of V.S. Naipaul's comments. Naipaul has the ultimate sensitivity to the "stories" that people tell about their lives, for him subjective perceptions are priority data (Naipaul, 1987). Buruma (1991) has judged:

> What makes Naipaul one of the worlds most civilized writers is his refusal to be engaged by the People, and his insistence on listening to people, individuals, with their own language and their own stories. To this extent he is right when he claims to have no view; he is impatient with abstractions. He is interested in how individual people see themselves and the world in which they live. He has recorded their histories, their dreams, their stories, their words. (p.3)

So far then Naipaul echoes the concern of those educational researchers who have sought to capture teachers' stories and narratives, told in their own words and in their own terms. But I am interested by the more recent shifts in Naipaul's position; he has begun to provide far more historical background, he seems to me to be moving towards providing the stories but also genealogies of context. He is clear that he sees this as empowering those whose stories which he once told more passively: "to awaken to history was to cease to live instinctively. It was to begin to see oneself and one's group the way the outside world saw one; and it was to know a kind of rage." (p. 4)

MacIntyre (1981) has followed a similar line in arguing that man is "essentially a story-telling animal". He argues that, "the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity".

> What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognise it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition. It was important when I characterised the concept of a practice to notice that practices always have histories and that at any given moment what a practice is depends on a mode of understanding it which has been transmitted often through many generations. And thus, insofar as the virtues sustain the relationships required for practices, they have to sustain relationships to the past--and to the future--as well as in the present. But the traditions through which particular practices are transmitted and reshaped never exist in isolation for larger social traditions.

He continues:

> Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life. Once again the narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions. (pp. 206-7)

In many ways Middleton (1992) summarises the aspirations when she says:

> Teachers, as well as their students, should analyse the relationship between their individual biographies, historical events, and the constraints imposed on their personal choices by broader power relations, such as those of class, race and gender. (p. 19)

In providing such intercontextual analysis, the different methodologies highlighted in this volume all provide important avenues. They all combine a concern with telling teachers' stories with an equal concern to provide a broader context for the location, understanding and grounding of those stories.

In awakening to history in our studies of teachers' stories, I have felt for some time that life history work is a most valuable avenue for collaborative, intercontextual work (Goodson, 1992). The distinction between life stories and life histories is an important one to restate. The life story is a personal reconstruction of experience, in this case by the teacher. 'Life story givers' provide data for the researcher often in loosely structured interviews. The researcher seeks to elicit the teacher's perceptions and stories but is generally rather passive rather than actively interrogative.

The life history also begins with the life story that the teacher tells but seeks to build on the information provided. Hence other people's accounts might be elicited, documentary evidence and a range of historical data amassed. The concern is to develop a wide intertextual and intercontextual mode of analysis. This provision of a wider range of data allows a contextual background to be constructed.

Crucial to the move to life history is a change in the nature of collaboration. The teacher becomes more than a teller of stories and becomes a more general investigator; the external researcher is more than a listener and elicitor of stories and is actively involved in textual and contextual construction. In terms of give and take, I would argue a more viable trading point can be established. This trading point, by focussing on stories <u>in context</u>, provides a new focus to develop our joint understandings of schooling. By providing this dialogue of a 'story of action within a theory of context' a new context is provided for collaboration. In the end, the teacher researcher can collaborate in investigating not only the stories of lives but the contexts of lives. Such collaboration should provide new understandings for all of us concerned with the world of schooling.

Personal Knowledge and Educational Research

As we have seen, story telling has been a sign in the media of a move away from cultural and political analysis. Why then might we assume that it would be any different in educational and social research. After all, educational research has tended to be behind mainstream cultural and political analysis in its cogency and vitality rather than ahead of it.

Let us go back a step. Storytelling came in because the modes of cultural and political analysis were biased, white, male and middle class. Other ways of knowing and representing grew at the periphery to challenge the biased centre. However, these oppositional discourses, having achieved some success in representing "silenced voices" have remained ensconced in the particular and the specific. They have, in short, not developed their own linkages to cultural, political analysis.

The assumption of so much postmodernist optimism is that by empowering new voices and discourses, by telling you stories in short, we will rewrite and reinscribe the old white male bourgeois rhetoric, so it may be. But, so what?

New stories do not of themselves analyse or address the structures of power. Is it not the commonsensical level, worthy of pause, to set the new stories and new voices against a sense of the centre's continuing power? The western version of high modernity is everywhere ascendant — we have an unparalleled "end of history triumphalism" with most of the historical challenges vanquished. Is this new ascendent authoritarian capital a likely vehicle for the empowerment of the silenced and the oppressed? This seems unlikely, particularly as capital has historically been the vehicle for the very construction and silencing of the same oppressed groups. Is it not more likely then that new discourses and voices that empower the periphery actually at one and the same time fortify, enhance and solidify the old centres of power. In short, are we not witnessing the old game of divide and rule?

The collection of stories then, especially the mainstream stories that live out a "prior script", will merely fortify patterns of domination. We shall need to move from life stories to life histories, from narratives to genealogies of context, towards a modality that embraces "Stories of action within theories of context". In so doing stories can be "located", seen as the social constructions they are, fully impregnated by their location within power structures and social milieux. Stories then provide a starting point for active collaboration, "a process of deconstructing

the discursive practices through which one's subjectivity has been constituted (Middleton, 1992, p. 20)". Only if we deal with stories as the *starting point* for collaboration, as the *beginning* of a process of coming to know, will we come to understand their meaning; to see them as social constructions which allow us to locate and interrogate the social world in which they are embedded.

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